



Hegel



Feuerbach



Marx



Engels

## Feuerbach and the End of German Philosophy

Nine years before the end of his life - he died in 1895 - and three years after Karl Marx's death, Frederick Engels returned to [the beginning](#) with his undoubtedly classic 1886 work "[Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy](#)" (attached, and downloadable via the links given below, in two separate files).

The following is how Engels confirms the place of our first (in this course) "classic" book as the original work of Marxism.

["The German Ideology"](#) at that point (1886) had not yet been saved from "the gnawing criticism of the mice". It was not published until 1932.

*"In the preface to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy, published in Berlin, 1859, Karl Marx relates how the two of us in Brussels in the year 1845 set about: "to work out in common the opposition of our view" — the materialist conception of history which was elaborated mainly by Marx — to the ideological view of German philosophy, in fact, to settle accounts with our erstwhile philosophical conscience. The resolve was carried out in the form of a criticism of post-Hegelian philosophy. The manuscript, two large octavo volumes, had long reached its place of publication in Westphalia when we received the news that altered circumstances did not allow of its being printed. We abandoned the manuscript to the gnawing criticism of the mice all the more willingly as we had achieved our main purpose — self-clarification! Since then more than 40 years have elapsed and Marx died without either of us having had an opportunity of returning to the subject."*

"Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy" is in four parts, of which the first is nominally about [George William Frederick Hegel](#) (1770-1831).

In "Ludwig Feuerbach, Part 1" Engels says that the revolutions of 1789 and 1848 were each preceded by uproar in the field of philosophy; but with differences.

Whereas the French pre-revolutionary philosophers had been banned and proscribed, Hegel had advanced in *“a triumphant procession which lasted for decades”*. At times Hegelianism had held *“the rank of a royal Prussian philosophy of state”*. In the decade following Hegel’s death, until the denunciatory lectures of Schelling in 1841 which Engels attended, *“‘Hegelianism’ reigned most exclusively.”* This reign, and the subsequent fall, was the well-ploughed philosophical ground in which Marxism germinated and started to grow.

Engels says:

*“At that time politics was a very thorny field, and hence the main fight came to be directed against religion; this fight, particularly since 1840, was indirectly also political.”*

This proxy role played in politics by religion (and philosophy) in 1840s Germany is the reason for the apparent elevation of the dichotomy of idealism and materialism, as if this dichotomy explains everything, when by itself it explains nothing. The relationship of (thinking) Subject and (material) Object is dialectical, and not absolute.

Lenin wrote:

*“It is impossible completely to understand Marx's Capital, and especially its first chapter, without having thoroughly studied and understood the whole of Hegel's Logic. Consequently, half a century later none of the Marxists understood Marx!!”*

So Hegel was much more than a John the Baptist to Karl Marx's Christ. Hegel had gathered up everything that had gone before, and displayed it as unified history. Hegel made the methodology that served as Marx's constant framework.

Engels writes:

*"... with Hegel philosophy comes to an end; on the one hand, because in his system he summed up its whole development in the most splendid fashion; and on the other hand, because, even though unconsciously, he showed us the way out of the labyrinth of systems to real positive knowledge of the world."*

The second linked item is a return to Engels' Ludwig Feuerbach, in its fourth and final part, dealing with Engels' now-deceased friend Karl Marx. Engels writes:

*"Out of the dissolution of the Hegelian school, however, there developed still another tendency, the only one which has borne real fruit. And this tendency is essentially connected with the name of Marx (1).*

*"The separation from Hegelian philosophy was here also the result of a return to the materialist standpoint. That means it was resolved to comprehend the real world — nature and history — just as it presents itself to everyone who approaches it free from preconceived idealist crotchets. It was decided mercilessly to sacrifice every idealist fancy which could not be brought into harmony*

*with the facts conceived in their own and not in a fantastic interconnection. And **materialism means nothing more than this.***”

Materialism, covered in the second and third parts of this work, was crucial to Marx’s theories.

Materialism gazed mercilessly at the objective universe from the point of view of the free individual human being.

But materialism did not amount to an elevation of the material universe to the status of a “prime mover” God, progenitor of life and breather of spirit into man. Materialism means nothing more than reality, as opposed to fantasy; that is, reality as seen by the human Subject.

The remainder, Part 4 of “Ludwig Feuerbach” becomes one of those grand sweeping overviews of which both Engels and Marx were capable. In this case science, philosophy and class politics are interwoven in an undoubtedly dialectical way.

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [Feuerbach and the end of German Philosophy, 1886, Engels.](#)
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